



Leather jacket, Saint
Laurent by Hedi Slimane.
Sequined silk top, Lanvin

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

KARLIE KLOSS IS THE FACE OF GENERATION SLASHIE: A SUPERMODEL, ENTREPRENEUR, CODER, STUDENT, BAKER, PHILANTHROPIST AND VLOGGER. AS SHE EXPANDS HER INFLUENCE IN THE DIGITAL WORLD, BRINGING TOGETHER THE SHARPEST FEMALE BRAINS IN TECHNOLOGY FOR ELLE, **LOTTE JEFFS** MEETS HER IN NEW YORK AND FINDS A WOMAN ON THE VERGE OF WORLD DOMINATION

Photography Kai Z Feng Fashion Anne-Marie Curtis

Nobody panic, but Karlie Kloss is having an allergic reaction to glitter. She's been spray painted with the stuff for a photoshoot in London and is, her agent tells me as I wait to interview her, currently being assessed by a medic because her throat has swollen up and she is 'really not OK'. It turns out supermodels, like superheroes, have a weakness and if Karlie's kryptonite is glitter, it's so fabulously 'fashion' that I couldn't possibly resent having to fly to New York the following week to meet her there instead.

The location is a hip cafe in the West Village where people order a single almond milk chai latte and spend all day sipping it while using the free Wi-Fi to work on their screenplay or start-up. Outside it's raining and affluent-looking women in Lululemon leggings and Parkas carry their tiny dogs tight to their chests. This is Karlie's neighbourhood, but my god is she sorry for making me come all the way here from England. As she wraps her long arms around me in a hug, which has caught me somewhat off guard, she can't stop apologising. 'Honestly,' I say, 'I'm very happy to be here.' And I mean it.

Karlie Kloss has long been my favourite of the current crop of supermodels. If we were trading model Top Trumps I would always take a Karlie card over Jourdan, Natalia, Joan or even a high-scoring Cara. I mean, hello, she is studying computer coding and runs a scholarship, Kode With Karlie, which has given 21 young women across the US the opportunity to take the Flatiron School's two week pre-college coding class. Plus, she's smart. I later find out quite how smart as our conversation spans deep space, cyber apocalypse, codebreaker Alan Turing, and the democratising language of technology. (I also learn that she loves puppies, and hates wasting food, insisting on taking my half-eaten avocado toast and her cold undrunk coffee home in a paper bag.) It's also quite unique the way Karlie can appear so edgy one minute - 'like an alien' as she puts it - and the next transform into that American girl-next-door who has a winning smile and probably a batch of cookies in the oven.

Talking of which, she hands me a bag containing a jar of Klossies, the vegan sugar-free cookies she developed with New York bakery Momofuku Milk Bar, the profits of which go to charities benefiting hungry children around the world.

It might not surprise you to learn that before we even start talking, I'm entirely won over by all 6ft 2in of her. But as much as I'm a sucker for a beautiful girl in tight



Silk dress, Mary
Katrantzou. Leather
shoes, Gucci

Kai Z Feng



Yellow silk-chiffon dress,
Jonathan Saunders

Kai Z Feng



This page: Cotton-mix jacket and elastic and metal belt, both Versace. Cotton shorts, J Brand
Opposite: Silk top, silk skirt and leather belt, all Lanvin. Silver necklace, Gemporia

Kai Z Feng



(Frame) jeans, knee-high (Stuart Weitzman) boots and a figure-hugging Alexander Wang sweater, I'm also, ahem *gathers self*, a highly professional journalist. So as I stare into her deep green/grey eyes (stop it!), I ask her to explain to me once and for all what coding actually is because I hate to admit that I'm not sure I get it. 'OK, so code is the language that writes the technology that we interact with,' she explains between mouthfuls of scrambled egg whites. 'It's how computers understand commands and directions.'

'Every device speaks this language and understanding it means you can build something that reaches many people. It doesn't matter if you want to work in fashion or start a non-profit. With the ability to code you can problem solve in a really powerful way. Every industry is being transformed by technology and you either adapt or get left behind. So I think why coding has grown to be so powerful, especially for young women, is that it gives you the understanding and the skills to be a part of the change and a part of writing the future.'

The young guy in thick-rimmed spectacles sitting next to us types ever more frantically on his laptop and we notice he's writing lines of code. Karlie turns to him, smiles and says, 'Sorry to interrupt, but that's so cool.' His eyes widen as he recognises her and he turns back to his screen, thrilled but embarrassed, and probably itching to update his status to 'supermodel complimented my coding #yolo'.

Karlie, 23, was born in Chicago, Illinois and moved to St Louis, Missouri, at the age of two. She's the middle of three sisters: Kristine, 26, who lives in San Francisco and works in the fashion and tech industry; Kimberly, 20, who's currently studying in Paris; and Kimberly's twin, Kariann, who wants to be a vet (no one tell the Kardashians there's a classier krowd in town!). Her dad, Kurt, is an emergency room doctor and her mum, Tracy, is a graphic artist who battled a very aggressive form of breast cancer while Karlie was growing up. This might go some way to explaining Karlie's caring nature and maturity (and the fact that she clears all the plates away on our table before we leave the cafe). Here is someone who has done a lot of looking after and a lot of staying strong. 'I'm very close with all of my sisters and my family, but I'm also very independently driven,' she says. 'I always felt I had more to prove. I was the bridge between the two, the older sister and the younger sisters, and I definitely think I'm the keeper-together.'

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Karlie was spotted when she was 13-years-old at a charity fashion show in her hometown. Three years later, she signed with a modelling agency, walking 31 shows at New York Fashion Week including closing for Marc Jacobs.

At school she was also a high achiever, competing in football, tennis and swimming tournaments, and studying ballet. 'I'm as competitive with myself as much as [I am] with other people and peers,' she tells me. It's clear her current success and influence is in no small part down to this drive (3.6 million Instagram followers; global ambassador for L'Oréal Paris; face of campaigns for Kate Spade, Jason Wu and Nike). 'You know, I really want to do it all. I have grand ambitions to have a successful career, and have a successful personal life, and make a meaningful impact on the world...'

I certainly relate to this desire to 'do it all' and I'm sure many of you reading this do too, because for us millennials the pressure to take advantage of every possible opportunity that comes our way is real. We are indeed 'generation slashie' - but Karlie takes it to the extreme as a model/entrepreneur/philanthropist/student/coder. She agrees that this endless drive to be 'more than' can be exhausting for any of us.

Karlie thinks back to the ELLE cover shoot: 'OK, so I'm jet lagged to start with. We're shooting and I have a speech I need to write because I'm presenting an award to Nick Knight at the British Fashion Awards later that evening, so I'm nervous about that. Then I have this [school] paper that's hanging over my head that I've neglected to write. And I'm thinking I need to post a cover that just came out today on my Instagram, and I need to meet this person and I have this 10-page story and a cover to shoot right now and it's all really important to me...'

I observed Karlie on the ELLE shoot and there was one brief moment when a tailor was called because her dress for the awards wasn't fitting, and she still needed to write a speech, and the photographer still needed more pictures. She took herself quietly into the changing room only to re-emerge five minutes later with slightly smudged mascara, apologising for having had 'a moment'.

If I were Karlie's older sister I might worry she was heading for a burnout. But speaking to her today, there's no sign of it. In front of me sits a woman who is taking great joy in doing it all. And doing it well.

Part of doing it all currently involves taking classes at The Gallatin School of Individualized Study, a small interdisciplinary college within New York University, >

Black leather jacket,
Saint Laurent by
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@KARLIEKLOSS

as well as computer programming classes at the Flatiron School. And she's enjoying getting to grips with a new kind of knowledge: 'I grew up thinking that medicine was going to be my calling. I really love maths, science and logic, and now I've also been exposed to so much creative thinking in the fashion industry I feel both sides of my brain are being really stimulated. Fashion is very intertwined with tech - they interact on every level. It's how consumers shop, it's how people absorb media and content. So I think having a comprehension of how things are built helps you be part of the conversation.' I ask what kind of student she is and she tells me that recently she hasn't felt like a particularly responsible one. 'Last night at 11pm, after presenting a Women of Worth award for L'Oréal [and looking dazzling in a white cut-out dress by New York designer Rosie Assoulin], I went home and wrote an essay until 3am because I'd left it until the last minute.'

Despite the late nights, Karlie says, 'I love to learn, to understand things and why they work.' And actually, she explains it's this that interests her far more than being a consumer of technology. She claims to be 'kind of old-fashioned' in her communication and says that rather than interact on social media, she would 'prefer to sit and have a conversation and feel present' where she is. 'As transformative and wonderful as technology is,' she points out, 'at times I think being so absorbed in these online personas can make it hard to exist in the actual moment.'

With the internet's power comes, of course, a potential dark side and we discuss the possibility of a monumental cyber attack that would destroy the very infrastructure of modern life and business. Karlie is pragmatic: 'I think the thing is, even if the online world collapsed we are the architects of it. Applications like Facebook or Instagram are individual buildings and the back end of the sites are the foundations of the building. We would rebuild because we have the knowledge and you can't destroy knowledge.'

Karlie checks herself in for a digital detox once a week. 'I will totally shut off and not post Instagrams or answer my emails. I think it's important to step away for a minute and actually reconnect with people and reconnect with yourself. We live at a very fast pace and sometimes you can lose priorities and perspectives.' Do her and her boyfriend of four years Joshua Kushner (an early investor in Instagram and co-founder of the digital health care start-up, Oscar) have a 'no phones in the bedroom' rule? She shakes her head. 'I keep my phone pretty close to me.' I ask if technology causes arguments

'AUTHENTICITY IS WHAT RESONATES WITH PEOPLE. IN FASHION RIGHT NOW IT'S ABOUT TAKING THAT FOURTH WALL DOWN'

between them, but she deftly deflects the question and instead I end up telling her that my partner and I fall out more over our addiction to our iPhones than we do anything else. Meanwhile, Karlie maintains the cool secrecy around her love life that comes from never speaking publicly about it. Told you she was smart.

What she will say is this: 'I definitely don't like negative confrontation. I'm not great at arguing. I'm not good at getting into fights. I always lose and it makes me really uncomfortable. But I guess real, true relationships and friendships come with ups and downs so it's about figuring out how to work with that. Sometimes those ups and downs bring you closer.'

And on the subject of friends, there's one woman in her recent contacts the world really cares about: 'Taylor [Swift] is someone I call if I want to have a fun night out as much as a cosy night in watching movies.' Taylor has said that they were destined to become buddies: 'I remember make-up artists and hair people going, "Doesn't she remind you of Karlie? God, she and Karlie would be best friends."' They met eventually through the model Lily Aldridge, and as Taylor has said: 'We were just like, "You. My friend. Now."' Karlie tells me, 'We've had a lot of fun and adventures, both being glamorous and being normal twentysomethings.'

Her other great friend is society gadabout and writer Derek Blasberg, who you might be forgiven for surmising from his Instagram is a rent-a-GBF for the young international fashion crowd. But Karlie doesn't see him like that: 'Derek and I are from the same area in St Louis. [The 10-year-age gap meant they weren't part of the same gang growing up.] I phone him when I need help with my homework, when I need a good laugh, or when I'm going home. We were just last night on the phone talking about our holiday plans and having a joint family bowling party'.

She's a loyal friend and a good listener. Her peers from school have all just finished their fourth year of college and are now, as Karlie puts it, in the real world: 'I'm so proud of them because they're all starting their careers and this journey as an adult. I've been in the real world since we were in high school, so it's funny; they watched me build this career in the real world and now it's so exciting to watch them start theirs.'

As for the current obsession with being in a #girlsquad, she doesn't seem as convinced as a certain Ms Swift. I get the sense that when Karlie calls you a friend she means it, whether it has a pithy hashtag or

not. 'If you have one person in your life that you connect with then you're lucky. If you have a group of friends that you have that connection with then you're especially lucky, and if you have people in your family you feel that way about then you've really won the game.'

She claims to be the same person with her home-town girlfriends as she is with her glamorous crowd of A-list besties, but says the only time she noticeably changes is when she takes on a character on a shoot or is about to step out on a runway: 'I love the performance aspect of being a model, but otherwise I try to be who I am.'

It seems like the right time to ask about Victoria's Secret (VS), which she walked in for four years before quitting Angel duties in February 2015. Why did she ditch such a big money gig (VS contracts can be worth millions of dollars), which co-starred some of her best buddies? 'I don't want to be too clean cut, and I don't want to be what people think I should be or expect me to be. I didn't necessarily feel like I was being entirely true to myself being in my underwear all the time.'

Incidentally, she calls herself a feminist. But a feminist in the way most people who don't want to be branded bra-burners and man-haters do, by saying 'I mean, any modern woman who cares about equality is a feminist in some way, shape or form.'

In the fashion world Karlie agrees 'there's this really wonderful moment right now that's celebratory of difference and diversity'. She says, 'I hope it's not a trend, because it's the way that women feel most beautiful, when they're celebrating their uniqueness, their individuality. There are a lot of girls now with beautiful hair that isn't being flat-ironed to look exactly like the girl next to her in the fashion show.' She believes this proves that 'authenticity is what actually resonates with people. In fashion right now it's about taking that fourth wall down, and for models it's really freeing.'

As she talks, I build up this idea of Karlie striding through life (literally, those legs!) trying tirelessly to be a good friend, a good sister, a good role model and supermodel, a great business woman, fit and athletic but not too skinny, an excellent coder and baker of vegan cookies, and giver of awards and scholarships. It doesn't sound like there's much time for letting go or having fun. When I ask when she last had a hangover, she claims not for a long time and says she flies under the radar for her really fun nights out, which often happen back home where there are no waiting paparazzi to snap her rolling out of nightclubs. But right now, she's got too much going on to risk a duvet day. Back on the subject of 'doing it all', Karlie makes the point that 'it's not necessarily enough

to only be a great model these days, because if you are a great model you recognise all the things that you can do in addition to your job, and if you're interested and inquisitive, well then the world's your oyster.'

And it's not just the world: there's a whole galaxy out there. For the record, Karlie Kloss does want to go into space (just not, like, really deep space). 'Consumer space travel is mindblowing but there's a lot that needs to be worked out still. When you think about human evolution and how bodies adapt; our biology has never had to handle that kind of atmosphere. I wonder if we know enough yet about the implications it will have. I wouldn't necessarily want to go all the way to Mars. The claustrophobia would be pretty real for me. I'd need a seat with extra leg room for sure.'

We leave the cafe for a stroll around her neighbourhood once the rain has stopped. Karlie in the real world turns heads and I ask her what it's like to be so conspicuous. 'It was hard as a teen, being like a stick and awkward and tall and flat-chested and kind of alien looking. It definitely messes with your psyche, it makes you insecure. But I've learned to find confidence in what makes me different, because it's fuelled me in my career, ironically. But being recognised on the street as Karlie Kloss? I mean, there's no getting used to that.'

I don't think the dog walker who Karlie stops to chat with about his two adorable puppies has the first clue that he's currently talking breeding with a supermodel; she's so easy and charming with him. We take selfies sitting on a bench with the dogs and then it's time for Karlie to leave. She has a flight to catch and the whirlwind that is her life must maintain its momentum. We say goodbye (I'm more prepared for this embrace and take a millisecond to enjoy it), and after Karlie leaves me on the bench processing two hours in her presence, a bird on a ledge above me drops a load right where Karlie was sitting just moments earlier. It's as though it'd been waiting patiently for her to leave all this time.

I look up at the bird and I think we agree: you couldn't do that to Karlie Kloss. You just couldn't. ●

Turn to p201 for Karlie's edit of most inspiring women in tech

For shopping details, see Address Book. Hair: Soichi Inagaki at Saint Luke using Bumble and bumble. Make-up: Naoko Sohtu at Saint Luke, using Dior Spring Look Glowing Gardens and Capture Totale Dreamskin. Manicure: Emma Welsh using Leighton Denny at August Management. Talent: Karlie Kloss at IMG. With thanks to Sunbeam Studios.

